

Message Text

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FOLLOWING TELEGRAM FROM ISLAMABAD DATED MAY 25, 1&77
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 5394

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: BHUTTO/PNA NEGOTIATIONS

1. NEW GENERATED BY PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE NEGOTIATOR SARDAR QAYYUM KHAN'S MEETINGS WITH PNA LEADERS HAS BROUGHT NEW HOPE THAT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PNA AND THE PM WILL BE SOLVED OVER A CONFERENCE TABLE RATHER THAN IN THE STREETS. THROUGHOUT HIS TRAVELS, WHICH HAVE CONTINUED OVER THE PAST WEEK, QAYYUM HAS BROUGHT AN AIR OF CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM TO THE SITUATION. IN AN APP REPORT PUBLISHED IN THIS MORNING'S (MAY 25) NEWSPAPERS SARDAR QAYYUM IS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT THE PNA WILL BE PREPARED TO RESPOND BY TOMORROW ON THE QUESTION OF WHETHER OR NOT A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE RIVALS WILL TAKE PLACE TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 STATE 122873

TO THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS.

2. DESULTORY DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE PM AND THE PNA LEADERSHIP HAVE BEEN A LEIT MOTIF OF THE CRISIS ALMOST SINCE ITS BEGINNING IN EARLY MARCH. UNTIL NOW, HOWEVER, THE TALKS HAVE, IN LARGE MEASURE, BEEN PART OF A PR CAMPAIGN WAGED BY BOTH SIDES HOPING TO PROJECT AN AIR OF REASON AND WILLINGNESS TO DISCUSS DIFFER-

ENCES RATHER THAN AN ACTUAL ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE THOSE DIFFERENCES. DESPITE THE ALMOST DAILY DISCUSSIONS AT SIHALA AND ELSEWHERE NEITHER SIDE HAS VISIBLY COMPROMISED ON THE POSITIONS WHICH ORIGINALLY CREATED THE IMPASSE. WHILE BHUTTO CONTINUOUSLY TRUMPETS HIS WILLINGNESS TO SETTLE THE ISSUE OVER THE CONFERENCE TABLE HE HAS STEADFASTLY REFUSED TO MOVE TOWARD MEETING TWO OF THE THREE "NON-NEGOTIABLE" DEMANDS OF THE PNA, I.E., THE PM'S RESIGNATION, AND DISSOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WITH NEW ELECTIONS SUPERVISED BY THE ARMY AND THE JUDICIARY. HE HAS INDICATED HE WOULD BE WILLING TO MEET THE THIRD PNA DEMAND - THE FORMATION OF A NEW ELECTION COMMISSION. INSTEAD THE PM HAS INTRODUCED A NUMBER OF "COMPROMISES," THE REFERENDUM ONLY BEING THE LATEST IN THE SERIES, WHICH DO NOT RESPOND TO THE FUNDAMENTAL PNA DEMANDS AND WHICH DO NOT FULLY ADDRESS THEMSELVES TO THE ISSUES AT HAND. THE PNA HAS BEEN NO MORE FORTHCOMING IN THEIR APPROACH TO NEGOTIATIONS. THEY MAINTAIN THAT THEIR THREE BASIC DEMANDS ARE "NON-NEGOTIABLE" AND MUST BE MET PRIOR TO HOLDING ANY SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSIONS WITH THE PM. ALTHOUGH IT IS CLEAR TO ALL THAT NO SOLUTION TO THE CRISIS CAN BE FOUND WITHOUT SOME COMPROMISE ON THESE DEMANDS THE OPPOSITION HAS REMAINED UNMOVED.

3. A RELATIVELY RECENT ADDITION TO THE TALKS IS THE ATTEMPTS OF SEVERAL MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES, NOTABLY THE SAUDIS, TO USE THEIR GOOD OFFICES TO NEGOTIATE A SETTLEMENT. THESE HAVE MET WITH MIXED RESULTS. THE MEETINGS WITH THE KUWAITI FOREIGN MINISTER, FOR EXAMPLE, WERE GENERALLY UNPRODUCTIVE AND WERE NOT WELL RECEIVED BY THE PNA. IN CONTRAST, THE SAUDI AMBASSADOR'S EFFORTS HAVE BEEN APPLAUDED BY BOTH SIDES AND THERE IS NOW RISING SPECULATION IN THE PRESS THAT KING KHALID MAY PERSONALLY VISIT PAKISTAN IN AN CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 STATE 122873

ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE THE CONFLICT. SARDAR QAYYUM, IN A PRESS CONFERENCE ON MAY 24, FURTHER STOKED THE FIRES OF SPECULATION BY COMMENTING THAT A VISIT BY THE KING IS INDEED POSSIBLE IF THE CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS MEET AN INSURMOUNTABLE OBSTACLE. POLITICAL OBSERVERS ARE DUBIOUS, HOWEVER, THAT THE KING WOULD RISK HIS OWN REPUTATION IN A SITUATION WHERE THE OUTCOME IS FAR FROM CLEAR, BUT THE POWER OF THE "KEEPER OF THE FAITH" TO FORCE BOTH SIDES TO APPROACH THE TALKS SERIOUSLY IS UNDENIABLE. SOME PAKISTANIS NO DOUBT SEE HIS COMING TO PAKISTAN AS THE MOST PROMISING MEANS OF FINDING A SOLUTION WHICH WILL GIVE BOTH SIDES A FACE-SAVING OUT.

4. ANOTHER POSSIBLE APPROACH THE SAUDIS MAY BE CONSIDERING, ACCORDING TO PNA-INSPIRED RUMORS, WOULD BE A DENIAL OF FURTHER AID TO PAKISTAN UNTIL AN AGREEMENT IS REACHED BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES. THIS SEEMS UNLIKELY FOR SEVERAL REASONS. CUTTING OFF AID AT THIS TIME WOULD GENERALLY BE INTERPRETED AS AN ANTI-BHUTTO GESTURE AS THIS GOVERNMENT IS DEPENDENT ON SAUDI HELP IF IT IS TO PRESENT ANY SEMBLANCE OF A BALANCED BUDGET. TO DENY THE GOP

THIS AID AT A TIME WHEN THE BUDGET IS COMING UP FOR CONSIDERATION WOULD CAST FURTHER DOUBT ON THE CONTINUED VIABILITY OF THE BHUTTO REGIME AND WOULD BE CONTRARY TO WHAT WE UNDERSTAND IS THE SAUDI WAY OF DOING BUSINESS.

5. THE POSSIBILITY OF NEW NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS HAS GIVEN RISE TO SPECULATION ON A POSSIBLE SOLUTION TO THE CURRENT IMPASSE. THIS SCENARIO WOULD CALL FOR THE PM TO SIMPLY PROMISE NEW ELECTIONS FOR THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN RETURN FOR WHICH THE PNA WOULD CEASE ITS PRESENT POLITICS OF AGITATION. THE MODALITIES OF THE ELECTION AND OTHER ISSUES DIVIDING THE TWO SIDES WOULD THEN BE DISCUSSED. VARIOUS JOURNALISTIC SOURCES KONTEND THIS IS THE OFFER FROM BHUTTO WHICH SARDAR QAYYUM IS DISCUSSING WITH HIS PNA COLLEAGUES. PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO RAISED THE POSSIBILITY OF HOLDING NEW ELECTIONS AT SOME FUTURE DATE IN HIS REFERENDUM SPEECH ALTHOUGH HE CONTINUES TO MAINTAIN THAT THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE AT THE MOMENT BECAUSE OF THE CURRENT INFLAMED POLITICAL SIT-
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 STATE 122873

UATION. SIGNIFICANTLY, FEDERAL INFORMATION MINISTER TAHIR MOHAMMAD ON MAY 24 SAID NEW NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS ARE POSSIBLE AND FLOATED THE IDEA OF HOLDING THEM NEXT MARCH.

6. A WELL-PLACED SOURCE HAS TOLD OUR DEFENSE ATTACHE'S OFFICE THAT BHUTTO TOLD KHA HE WILL AGREE TO HOLD NEW NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS AND THEY WILL BE SCHEDULED FOR SOMETIME WITHIN THE NEXT TWO MONTHS. THE SOURCE CLAIMED THAT THIS IS IN RESPONSE TO MILITARY PRESSURE ON BHUTTO AS A RESULT OF THE MILITARY'S PERCEPTION THAT THIS IS THE ONLY OUT FOR THE COUNTRY. WHILE THIS IS ANOTHER INDICATION THAT THERE MAY BE REAL MOVEMENT ON THIS FRONT THE TWO MONTH TIME FRAME SEEMS TO BE TOO SHORT. BHUTTO WILL NEED MORE THAN TWO MONTHS TO REGROUP HIS FORCES AND STRENGTHEN HIS PORTRAYAL OF HIMSELF AS THE ONLY MAN WHO CAN LEAD PAKISTAN OUT OF THE CURRENT MORASS. WHETHER OR NOT THE PNA WILL TRUST BHUTTO TO KEEP HIS WORD IS CENTRAL TO WHETHER THE PNA WOULD ACCEPT THIS PROPOSAL, AS SUSPICION OF THE PM HAS BEEN A FACTOR IN ALL OF THE NEGOTIATIONS TO DATE. TO ACCEPT THE PM'S WORD THAT ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD WITHOUT GIVING ANY DETAILS IS UNDOUBTEDLY A "LEAP INTO FAITH" FOR AN OPPOSITION THAT HAS SO FAR DISPLAYED LITTLE FAITH IN HIM.

6. AT THE MOMENT THE COUNTRY AWAITS THE PROMISED ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE PNA AS TO WHETHER TALKS BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES WILL CONTINUE. A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT IS OBVOUSLY WHAT THE PROPLE WANT BUT IT IS A WISH THE TWO SIDES HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO FULFILL YET.
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